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‘Forever Families’; Christian individualism, Mormonism and collective salvation.

Book section

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1. I have a fam'ly here on earth.
They are so good to me.
I want to share my life with them through all eternity.

[Chorus]
Fam'lies can be together forever
Through Heav'nly Father's plan.
I always want to be with my own family,
And the Lord has shown me how I can.
The Lord has shown me how I can.

2. While I am in my early years,
I'll prepare most carefully,
So I can marry in God's temple for eternity. (repeat chorus)

Words: Ruth Muir Gardner, 1927–1999. © 1980 IRI

Music: Vanja Y. Watkins, b. 1938. © 1980 IRI

See also *Hymns,* no. 300. Doctrine and Covenants 138:47–48 Alma 37:35

http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?locale=0&sourceId=622e2ddde9c20110VgnVCM100000176f620a____&vgnextoid=198bf4b13819d110VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD

'Forever Families'

Contemporary Latter-day Saints, sometimes known as 'Mormons', like their historical forebears, are intensely preoccupied by the idea of entering heaven together with their kin. This ideal shapes the lives of those within the church, and is also the central message used by LDS missionaries to appeal to the hearts of potential converts in America and beyond. The song quoted at the head of this chapter, ' Fam'lies can be together forever, ' is an aural icon of Latter-day Saint culture and identity; instantly recognisable to anyone familiar with the church, always popular for children's classes and gatherings, it is also used for mission and publicity – particularly as the theme tune for church videos over several decades - and is even available as a mobile phone ringtone. [1] What the

[1] [1] See http://www.lyrics85.com/FAMILIES-CAN-BE-TOGETHER-FOREVER-LYRICS/395004/ accessed Feb. 11th, 2013 . It should be noted that the Church's publicity department made a decision (much discussed in LDS circles) to change

song appeals to is the fundamental idea of the Mormon Plan of Salvation; that all human beings existed together with God ('Heavenly Father') in the 'preexistence' (that is, in pre-mortal time), and knew each other in that estate. However, we largely forget this pre-mortal existence once we are born on earth, retaining only occasional glimpses or recollections of what was before. The purpose of this earthly life is to gain experience, pass through mortal physicality and test our obedience to revealed truth, as manifested in the restored knowledge of Christianity left to us by the Church's founding prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. and recorded in new LDS Scriptures supplementing the Old and New Testaments. If we pass through this time of trial successfully, we will be restored to the presence of Heavenly Father and to each other eternally, as resurrected (and still reproductive) physical beings in the highest level of LDS heaven, known as the Celestial Kingdom. In the Celestial Kingdom, all kin who accept the LDS gospels will be united with each other as 'families forever'. Parents and children, husbands and wives, ancestors and descendents will all be linked together, and their relationships will be sacred and permanent. (See Cannell, 2005; Davies, 2000) The purpose of the Christian life as Latter-day Saints see it is therefore, from one viewpoint, to fulfil human beings' divinely-intended potential, which is the same as reclaiming and fulfilling their kinship with God and with each other. (Brown, 2012) Kinship relations in earthly life can be understood as demonstrating bonds already formed premortally, and are seen as precious connections to be guarded and preserved in the hereafter. (Cannell, 2013b)

Most anthropological approaches to the topic of 'spiritual kinship' have followed classic patterns in either Roman Catholic or Protestant practice. As Alfani (this volume) ably demonstrates, for European Catholic Christians over many centuries the emphasis was on the ability of the sacraments of the church to create transcendent bonds in addition to the links of socially-recognised or 'blood' kinship, including the bonds of co-godparenthood and, where applicable, marriage. [2] In addition, the idea of spiritual kinship within Catholicism has always included the idea of dedication to the Christian life in preference to social kinship, through commitment to religious orders, the priesthood, or any other instantiation of Christ's command ' leave your father and mother, and follow me.' As Seeman (this volume; see also Leite this volume) reminds us, Christians have tended to emphasise spiritual kinship thus understood as characteristic of their own faith, and to contrast this claim with a modelling of Judaism as 'tribal'. As Seeman also points out, this is a model we should be wary of, given that it erases complex debates within Jewish thinking and practice about the relationship between forms of belonging based on birth and

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the emphasis of its videos to the 'I'm a Mormon' campaign, which featured 'diverse' and strongly individual Latter-day Saints, in order to counter stereotyping to which the Church was especially sensitive during the Romney presidential candidacy. However, the centrality and appeal of the idea of 'forever families' has never faltered.

[2] The necessity for marriage to be blessed by the church or treated as sacrament (rather than as private contract) having varied and been contested over time.

on the law. A further variation on this caveat could be taken from the work of Gil Anidjar (2014) who has argued that the Christian presentation of Judaism as a religion of 'blood' connections is profoundly misleading; for Anidjar, Jewish physical idioms operate rather through the language of flesh and bone, while 'blood' is a Christian preoccupation that has colonised many apparently unrelated zones of modern political life. [3]

This chapter speaks to these observations and those of other authors in this volume, by exploring one aspect of the internal complexities of Christian traditions themselves (see also Feeley-Harnik, this volume). One effect of the tendency among non-Mormons to cast Latter-day Saints as exceptional, or even as 'not Christian' - a description my highly Cristocentric LDS interlocutors reject, and which they find painful- has been that anthropologists have not felt the need to account for LDS attitudes to kinship when considering what 'Christianity' is like. I argue, by contrast, that although the history of the LDS Church is certainly distinctive, it frequently expresses and makes explicit many themes which run through much broader constituencies of Christian thought- and indeed, wider American thought and practice (C.f. Bloom, 2013 [1992]). In particular, I suggest that Mormonism expresses another aspect of Protestant traditions than those normally engaged by anthropologists; rather than the focus on the Protestant individual and regimes of sincerity (Keane, 2007) or the loneliness of salvational imperatives in tension with traditional kinship morality (Robbins, 2004, 2007, 2010), I highlight here the ways in which in Mormonism, individual agency and responsibility are held in perpetual tension with a strongly desired and articulated *collective* salvational imperative (c.f. Shipps, 1987). This hope for and preoccuption with the idea of being saved together with one's kin itself has earlier historical roots, for instance in Puritan covenantal thinking (Brow, 2012); further, it found many responsive echoes in wider American Christian thought in the 19th century when the LDS church was established (McDannell 2001; Bloom 2013) as, in somewhat different forms, it also does today. To illustrate the continued investment of my Latter-day Saint friends and interlocutors in models of sacred kinship, I will discuss some aspects of the process of conversion into the church as they were related to me, in which it is the possibility of collective salvation which and also refer to some of the ways in which Latter-day Saints may respond to situations in which the attainment of the Celestial Kingdom by relatives is felt as morally imperative, but doctrinally uncertain.

The character of conversion.

My research with the LDS church was divided between time spent with a 'ward ' (local LDS congregation) in upstate New York, fairly near to the area of the Burn-Over District in which the church orginated in the 1830s, and time spent in the LDS heartlands of Utah. Many of the New York church members also had

[3] Carsten (2001) has productively problematised the category of blood in anthropological discussions . For direct discussions of this topic in relation to Mormon idioms of blood and the ethnography of adoption, see Cannell (2013 a and 2013b).

family in Utah, and so the divide was by no means absolute. However, the New York site was distinctive in that approximately half of the membership of the adult ward was composed of established, but first-generation, converts to the church, rather than (as may be the case with wards in Utah) made up almost entirely of people whose families had been Latter-day Saints for many generations. This allowed me the opportunity to ask people about their experiences of conversion to the church. My fieldwork situation contrasted with that considered by some other authors on conversion to the LDS church (e.g. Ong REF) who have focussed on the conversion of non-Americans, or of new American citizens arriving from other parts of the world such as Asia; in such contexts, the pull to become integrated into American society is often understood to be part of the attraction of conversion to the church. For my own interlocutors, however, this could not be the case, since everyone involved was already an American citizen of long standing.

Conversion to Christianity is a topic which is not infrequently explained in sceptical terms by outsiders, as a practical response to material pressures, or else as a form of self-deception and investment in illusion at times of emotional vulnerability. Where a church has been the target of criticism by other constituences of opinion, as is the case with for Latter-day Saints, this kind of explanation only gathers force.

Latter-day Saints themselves explicitly recognise that there is often a correlation between personal suffering and difficulty, and the propensity to convert, but they read this in a different way. Missionaries, in particular, stress that people who are less insulated by worldly success and good fortune, tend to be more open to hearing and recognising divine and prophetic truth. The conversion of people who have been living in poverty, or have otherwise struggled, is therefore readable as a completely appropriate process of the (restored) Christian message being above all the inheritance of the meek and the humble, as in apostolic times. I should note that this is not the only way that Latter-day Saints understand the recruitment of converts to their church, or the only way they understand the meaning of wealth and poverty. LDS doctrine includes the idea that numbers of 'choice spirits' may join the church in the days leading up to the end of times, and that some of these converts might be drawn from various special or elite groups.[4] Moreover, a significant number of Latter-day Saints tend to think in terms familiar from Protestant prosperity teachings, that the thriving of their own families and congregations may demonstrate the continued blessings of Heavenly Father on the LDS church.

For the purposes of the present argument, the most important point to acknowledge is Latter-day Saints, unlike some social analysts, do not think that poverty constitutes an ulterior motive for conversion that renders it less genuine. I wish to focus here on a somewhat different aspect of the accounts of conversion that were related to me; that is, their emphasis on *familial* rather

[4] One example of this kind of thinking would be the interest that many in the church show in converts from Judaism, which is given a special status as antecedent and partial model for Latter-day Saints.

than purely individual aspects and implications of conversion. It is my understanding that in joining the LDS church, people were above all converting to a particular sense of sacred kinship; this idea, however, emerged in various, sometimes uneven, ways in the context of different peoples' narratives and often involved converts in complex or even conflicted reflection on what 'collective salvation' might entail.

The importance of the element of 'rupture' or 'event' in conversion to Christianity is a classic (Pauline) theme, on which the work of Joel Robbins has provided a series of important new reflections within anthropology (2004, 2007, 2010). Robbins argued that anthropologists had failed to describe and to theorise discontinuity satisfactorily, and that in the context of conversion this led to an unjustified focus on elements of cultural persistence, rather than on the nature and experience of change itself. Robbins's own Urapmin ethnography seeks to redress this balance by describing the intense cultural disjuncture of conversion to Pentecostal Protestantism for a group of Melanesian people.

Despite this focus on the transformative event, Robbins's own description of the Urapmin hinges on the fact that they are not, in fact, fully transformed, but rather remain suspended or caught between two kinds of irreconcilable cultural imperative[5]. On the one hand, Christian salvation is viewed as an irreducibly *individual* matter; on the other hand, all traditional Urapmin values are 'relational' ; that is, the condition for the possibility of the ethical and good within this system (what Robbins, borrowing from Dumont, terms a 'paramount value') is the making and sustaining of kinds of social relationship between different categories of actor, such as between mothers and children. [6] In addition, traditional Urapmin political leadership involves the ability to make things happen for, and to help, other people. The tension between this relational ethics and the teaching that nobody can be saved for or on behalf of any other person, is acute. Robbins describes how his interlocutors are deeply preoccupied by, for instance, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; the message that the wise virgins do not (and should not) lend any of their lamp oil to the others, strikes a very difficult chord for Urapmin sensibilities. The only partial refuge from this conflict is found in millenarian teachings; the idea that everyone will face the end times together seems to suggest the possibility that everyone might, somehow, be saved together also.

In Robbins's explanation, therefore, the 'paramount value' of Christian or Western individualism comes into conflict with the 'paramount value' of Melanesian relationalism. Robbins, in his discussion of Dumont, acknowledges that other kinds of values may exist *within* paramount values, and he gives what

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[5] Robbins suggests that only integration in the capitalist economy would be likely to create Urapmin 'individuals' (2004). On the matter of continuities, one might note that the Urapmin have kept all their old gods, just in case there should be a need to return to them in the future (2004).

[6] Robbins specifies that Melanesian societies are not 'holistic' in the sense applied by Dumont to India, and that therefore there is no overarching concept of 'society'; I use the term 'social relationship' here for brevity.

is, for the purposes of this paper, an interesting example. The concept of 'the family' considered as a whole (an instance of 'holism') , he notes, does exist within Western settings, but is not allowed to come to the fore in any context where it might conflict with the dominant values of individualism. [7] Against this modelling, let me consider some examples of conversion stories from my own fieldwork with American Latter-day Saints.

Converting for the family.

Latter-day Saint conversion experience is supposed, in theory, to follow a very fixed and powerful model of the transformative event. LDS missionaries preparing for their eighteen months or two years of service, are taught to use a series of staged 'discussions' which can be conducted with potential converts ('investigators'). The precise format of these discussions has been revised several times in the modern period[8], but both the earlier and later formats pivot around the invitation by the missionaries to the investigator, to read the *Book of Mormon* and pray to know that the teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith are true. This invitation, which comes relatively early in the sequence of discussions, is intended to create a powerful identification with the 'First Vision' of the founding prophet Joseph Smith Jr. As a teenage boy in upstate New York in the early 1820s, Joseph prayed to know which of the many rival churches of the burnt-over district was true. According to the version of the vision now accepted as orthodox, two resurrected personages, God the Father and God the Son, appeared to Joseph and explained that no existing church was true, and that it would be Joseph's task to restore aspects of the gospels lost through apostasy since the time of Constantine. [9] According to the distinguished LDS scholar Terryl Givens, the investigator who prays to feel the truth of the First Vision both enters into a 'dialogic' relationship with the text of the Book of Mormon, and also encounters a new understanding of the divine figures seen by the boy prophet, as resurrected beings of 'flesh and bone'. This latter perception ties into the Mormon Plan of Salvation, and into the developing knowledge that human beings are literally the sons and daughters of God, and may eventually attain resurrected (divine-physical) status themselves, if they gain the Celestial Kingdom. (Givens, 2002) Further, all earthly kinship links that have been sacramentally 'sealed' through Mormon ritual [10]will be eternal and permanent in

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[7] Paramount values are said to be dominant in key areas of social life, such as the modern capitalist economy. For a framing that asks how much such claims are ideological and may disguise the complexity of social life, see McKinnon and Cannell (2013).

[8] Most recently in 2004 when the guide *Preach my Gospel* replaced the 1988 *Missionary Guide*, with the intention of making missionary discussions more personal and flexible. (http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-14-number-1-2013/history-preach-my-gospel)

[9] The First Vision has become foundational in twentieth century Mormonism and was less known in early Mormonism (wikipedia)

[10] The relevant rituals are generally performed in LDS temples. Children born to parents married in the temple are said to be 'born in the covenant' and are

the Celestial Kingdom. If Mormon conversion is modelled on an 'event' therefore, it is an event that holds out the potential for the triumph of kinship connection understood as part of the fabric of divinity.

For some of my American interlocutors, conversion was certainly marked by a sense of this Mormon 'event', not always prompted by the First Vision story, but frequently by reading the Book of Mormon. I think here of Linda, a dedicated member of the ward whose own natal family were highly observant Mexican Catholics, and who was converted while staying with LDS family friends. Linda was at first unmoved by the classic passage in the Book of Mormon which describes the First Vision of Joseph Smith. Her knowledge of Catholic Trinitarian doctrine made the episode seem alien to her. During discussions with LDS missionaries, she constantly drew back from the idea of God and Christ as separate persons.

' That he saw the Father and the Son, I found this unbelievable, you know, (laughs), I was like, " Tell me another fairytale!"'.

This went on until the missionaries reached the teaching on the Mormon Plan of Salvation. The questions for investigators relating to the lesson include; 'Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?' And when she heard them, Linda felt immediately a profound sense of recognition. 'These are the questions that I had always had.... I just fell in love with the doctrine.'

Then she had a profound religious experience. She was reading the Book of Mormon, and had reached the passage in the Book of Nephi (3 Nephi, 11-26) in which the resurrected Christ visits the Americas before ascending to be with his Father[11]. Linda was sitting in a big, lacey chair in her hosts' Salt Lake living room, reading the passage in which 'Christ says; "I haven't much time, and I will soon have to leave you", and the people ask him to tarry with them a little longer. And not only does he take time to stay, he sends for their children and blesses them; - not just the children all together, but *each individual child.*' It was as if, Linda says, she was watching the episode enacted on video, because she could see all the details of what was happening; ' I was transported... I was there... I was with him [Christ]' and she saw the faces of each of the children as Christ put his hand on their heads. 'I was sitting there, ... and tears were running down my face, and I want to repeat, I *knew* it was true. And then the father of the family came in, and said, ' Are you all right?' and I said, ' It's this book!' and he let out a big whoop; that was his reaction. Because they had all thought I was going to be a convert. '

Other people, however, reported a more gradual process in which the sense of event was relatively muted. They reported that there was no single, dramatic

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automatically sealed to their parents for eternity, although sealings can be forfeit for some sins.

[11] This is also the central episode in the church's Hill Cumorah Pageant which is held annually close to my upstate New York fieldsite. The significance of the Pageant for my interlocutors is discussed in Cannell (in preparation).

moment of vision or of 'burning in the bosom' (one key LDS paradigm for the experience of religious truth), saying instead that Mormon teaching 'just fit' or 'seemed right' or that it answered persistent questions that had never found satisfactory responses in their previous churches. These questions, however, were not an arbitrary selection, but tended to be of the same kind that Linda had found so resonant, and that are answered for Latter-day Saints by the Plan of Salvation.

Whether entering Mormon ontology suddenly or gradually, most of my interlocutors did their utmost not to convert alone. Many converts were explicit about the fact that they had been looking for a church that would be good for their children or other family members, and would support family relationships both practically and doctrinally. Gladys, who had suffered with lack of family support as a child, and who had been left to bring up her daughter as a single mother, commented; 'So we had the missionaries over, and my daughter was there and she took [the discussions] with me. And I learnt something, but I didn't get it clear, there was a lot of talk, but it was just overwhelming. I thought; how can this be? ... It [felt like] something I'd been looking for, for a long time... and didn't know there was any such thing. But I needed guiding because I had my daughter... If I was going to do things, they had to be appropriate for my life in raising her.' She added that from her observation, matters were very difficult when conversion divided family members from each other, and that it was much better when everybody joined the church together. Another member of the ward, Esther, had felt an intense, personal conviction of the truth of the LDS message; she was encouraged when her children warmed to the church when they visited one Sunday. Esther told me however that she had not expected to be able to convert because she anticipated that her husband Morris would not convert with her, and she would never have split her family. In the event, and to her great surprise, Morris agreed to join the church with her, and it was, they both told me, ' the best thing that we ever did for our marriage.' But this did not alter the fact that for Esther as for many other converts I spoke to, the attraction of the LDS message was one that they wanted to share with their families, and conversion was something that they wanted to do *for* their families.

<u>"Grafted in"</u>

This is not to suggest that the ideas of separation, of leaving something behind and of renewal – typically associated with 'born again' and other Protestant paradigms of conversion - are not present in Mormon thinking. On the contrary, some converts drew consciously on the imagery of death and resurrection in LDS baptism, to create a dividing line for themselves or another member of their family, from a painful past. The use of baptism by full immersion is important to Latter-day Saints and is explained in relation to the passing of Christ through the tomb and into new life. Mormon baptisands, whether children or adult converts, know this and rehearse themselves in the idea of the ritual efficacy of baptism and the change it will bring ; "If I do not go all the way under the water, I will have to do it again" as children approaching

the baptismal age of eight are taught in their Sunday school lessons[12]. Those who have been baptised know that they have been made 'clean' and that they have been given the Holy Spirit to be with them and guide them by personal revelation, in fulfillment of the promises given to Joseph Smith. Esther remarked that she had comforted a beloved adopted daughter, who had suffered traumatic early years in her natal home, with the sense that baptism would make her a new person, since this made her daughter feel safer and more confident in her life. Other people I knew who had joined the church had also thought of it as drawing a line between themselves and an abusive former spouse, neglectful parents, a chaotic childhood or the collapse of an adult love relationship, or even generations of poverty-related struggle. [13]

'I do remember feeling, when I was baptised in the church in the very beginning, I felt like something that was going to break, break the kind of bad history my family has, and from my generation forth they would be members of the church, they would know the truth.' (Clara, Upstate New York).

As baptism divides, it also connects. As I have argued elsewhere, (Cannell, 2013a, 2013b) contemporary Latter-day Saints are enabled by Mormon teaching on the premortal existence, to move beyond an opposition between social and spiritual kinship, and also beyond an opposition between 'biological' and social bases of kinship. Successful adoptive relationships, for instance, are often understood by adoptive families as being the fulfilment of premortal ties. In these framings, adoptive parent and adoptive child had already known, chosen and recognised each other before life in this world. Birth parents are the means through which adoptive parents and children are restored to each other in this world. If all goes well, they can also look forward to being eternally connected as kin in the Celestial Kingdom. This means that the anxiety about the grounding of parent-child ties against or without biological maternity that often figures in Western discourses of adoption (see e.g. Howell, 2009) , is – at least in theory and often, from what I can observe, in practice- trumped in Mormon thought by a doctrine which places the adoptive relationship both as originary and prior to mortal birth circumstances, and also (since the premortal existence is *not* 'immaterial' nor without reproduction, and neither is the Celestial Kingdom) endows it with its own register of shared physicality 'before', 'beyond' and 'behind' the facts of earthly birth. Esther's daughter is not only separated from her biological parents by baptism, but also re-connected to her adoptive parents, who are understood as parents to her in a much more than 'merely social' way, and to whom she is ritually sealed for eternity, as she is to her own husband and children. Mormon conversion, therefore, can separate people from kin who do not behave as proper kin should, and can connect them with an unbreakable and sacramental bond to those who do. Further, the idea of the pre-existence allows Latter-day Saints to view these new kin as, in fact, prior and authentic.

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[12] Known as 'Primary' in LDS circles.

[13] Although not my topic here, it seems very probable that contemporary Mormonism like wider American Protestant culture, has been influenced by the 'therapeutic turn' in religious life. (Madsen, 2014; see also Griffith, 2000)

These aspects of contemporary Mormon American adoption – although shaped, of course, by their intersection with U.S. secular law[14] - are also part of a diffuse but connected set of understandings in historical Mormonism of what 'adoption' might imply. At some stages in the nineteenth-century past, ordinary members of the rank and file church were ritually 'adopted' to church leaders in order to share in their sacramental status and thus protect their path to the Celestial Kingdom (promises). Such sacramental connections could either confirm or cut across biological and social kinship ties in early Mormonism and the equation appears never to have been fully stabilised during the lifetime of Joseph Smith (Brown) . Indeed, on the showing of my own research data, the equation has arguably never been fully stabilised to date, but continues to be both fluid and complex. During the early twentieth century, however, the LDS church ceded the practice of religious polygamy under pressure from the U.S. Federal state (Gordon, Flake) and this coincided with the church leaderships's turn towards an emphasis on idea that 'ordinary' earthly parenthood could be profoundly sacred in character, and could be the channel through which ritual and sacramental power could flow to successive generations.

The term 'adoption' had a further resonance, related directly to the understanding of baptism. For the founding prophet Joseph Smith and his immediate successor Brigham Young, in baptism the physical constitution of a person could be altered sacramentally. Smith viewed some Latter-day Saints as the re-emergent descendants of peoples originally from Biblical Israel, some of whom had travelled to the New World in ancient times; such people therefore physically as well as spiritually connected the present, and Smith's revealed and restored Christianity, to the earliest promises made by God to his people Israel. Where those who were baptised as Latter-day Saints had no such descent line, Smith argued, their blood would be physically transformed during baptism so that they too would be, ever afterwards, partakers of the promises made to Abraham and his seed.

Mormonism is, as Givens puts it, a religion of 'thoroughgoing monism' (2002) and therefore there is an intuitive consistency in the idea that rituals that other forms of Christianity might consider as creating 'spiritual' change only, would also create change in the substance of the person, since the two are indissolubly identified with each other.

A similar logic seems to underlie one of the classic ways in which knowledgeable Latter-day Saints describe conversion, which is as a process of 'grafting in'; - a form of description which was also used historically by Brigham Young. The technique of grafting was a key element in the settlement of America by Europeans accustomed to agriculture in the old world; varieties of fruit were grafted onto native rootstock to allow the cultivation of a range of apples, pears, peaches, cherries and plums that otherwise did not thrive in the unfamiliar climate. Grafting acquired symbolic significance in both the making of myths of

[14] On aspects of the historical development of adoption law in the U.S. see Zelizer (1985).

the frontier, and the expression of political attitudes; for some time, it signified sympathies with the wealthy elite, in contrast to the democratic overtones of growing fruit from seed (since fruit grown from seed often does not produce a second generation true to type). (Kerrigan, 2012) According to Kerrigan, grafting also suggested a skill so specialised as to have esoteric overtones, and complex organisational powers including the power of carefully timed integration with the developing market.

Mormon agriculture in Utah was and needed to be highly skilful, in order to sustain a people in desert terrain; both irrigation and fruit tree grafting were characteristic of Mormon settler communities. Presumably, however, the image of grafting appealed to Brigham Young and his fellow farmer-Saints also because of the mystery of identity that is created – by human craft and skill- in joining together two living organisms. Neither the root stock nor the fruit-bearing scion 'is' the tree; together they become the tree, and its unprecedented yield, brought together by processes and intentions both pragmatic and mysterious. Like Joseph Smith's revealed scriptures, in which Christ is discovered retrospectively always to have been present in the New World as well as the Old World, the process of grafting recasts the relationship of recent and ancient, and proves the underlying and mysterious compatibility of two different living strains, through the medium of a join.

If this is a good metaphor for the restorations ethos of Mormonism in general, it has a particular salience in relation to conversion. The Mormon use of the imagery of grafting certainly builds on and references Paul's Letter to the Romans, which discusses the fundamental identity of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and the conversion of Roman Gentiles (non-Jews). American contemporaries of Joseph Smith appear to have been interested in Paul's image Paul uses, of the Gentiles as 'wild olives' grafted onto a good olive tree (the church) ; the process was 'contrary to nature' since normally a good scion is grafted onto vigorous rootstock and not wild fruit onto good rootstock. Nevertheless, the graft resulted in the Gentiles changing their nature and yielding good fruit. (Chapman, 1819; 55-56) Like Joseph Smith's account of baptism, therefore, the modelling of conversion on grafting implied that 'gentile' converts to Mormonism could change their substance and not just their 'belief' and institutional affiliation. However, for the early prophets, some Mormon converts were not 'gentiles' but descendants of Abraham, rediscovered in America. Like the apostle Paul himself, they already shared the substance of Israel; their understanding of this identity, lost through apostasy, had been restored.

One of the crucial teachings of Joseph Smith was that the living should carry out vicarious rituals on behalf of the dead. By undertaking vicarious baptism on behalf of named deceased persons, living members of the church were able to extend the blessings of their religion to family members and friends who had died without having had the opportunity to convert to Mormonism. As this doctrine was elaborated, Latter-day Saints came to understand that missionaries also worked among the dead, so that no previous generation would be excluded from the opportunity of attaining the Celestial Kingdom. New

converts to the church whose ancestors were not members, are therefore strongly encouraged to carry out this temple work for their deceased kin. As a result, the first generation convert can and should activate a retroactive process by which his or her ancestors gradually become Latter-day Saints. 'Contrary to nature' Mormon conversion can thus reverse the normal flow of temporality and descent, creating a spiritual and substantive change that flows 'backwards' from the present to the past. It is this potential which gives hope to those Latter-day Saints whose conversion does, in fact, cause unwelcome breaches with their natal families; eventually, the family can be reunited, if not in this life (and most Latter-day Saint converts will put enormous effort into family reconciliation) then in the next.

If the potential for collective salvation is the central imaginative ground of Mormonism, it is however, never a matter of certainty. The principle of human free agency is equally embedded in the Mormon Plan of Salvation as is the prospect of Celestial kinship. For Latter-day Saints, it is only Satan who wants to bypass individual responsibility, and avoid mortal trials; but without mortal testing humans will be forever shut out of the Celestial Kingdom and cannot progress towards divinity. Both the living and the dead have free agency, and therefore the dead as well as the living can refuse to hear the truth of Joseph Smith's teachings, and decline conversion. Most Latter-day Saints tend to assume, that from their vantage point 'beyond the veil' the dead will in general accept the truth and join the church; the living are less predictable. Clara, who was quoted above imagining herself as the bringer of a new era of truth for her family, added in the same interview; 'Of course it hasn't come to pass yet, because my kids aren't active in the church or anything. ' But then, qualifying herself further, she added that "I think that, there's probably a reason for everything. When people join the church, there's a reason for that, and it could be something that was decided on in the pre-existence… I love that idea, and it's been a strength to me when I'm hit with… really heavy things in my life, I think 'You know there was a time when I knew this would happen, and I said I could deal with it, so, I'm going to be OK. I can do it.'

The 'really heavy things' that had occurred in Clara's life had included experiences which had led to her leaving the church for a number of years before she later re-joined it. It was partly for this reason that her children had not had a typical LDS upbringing, a fact that concerned her, but not unduly. She reasoned that they were good human beings and good citizens, and that the decision to join the church must be up to them. Some multi-generation Utah Saints I met, and inclined towards a strict doctrinal literalism in reasoning about salvation, but like a number of other convert families, Clara did not feel overwhelmed by the implication that her children, unless they were baptised, could never attain the Celestial Kingdom. She was, she said, 'Zen' about it; she was sure that it would all work out as it was meant to work out. Or, as another first generation convert put it, " If I got to the Celestial Kingdom and there's people missing, like my mother and my father, that doesn't sit well with me. So .there's got to be more."

Conclusion.

In this paper, I have set out an account of Latter-day Saint ideas about conversion, in order to test them against anthropological theories of spiritual kinship in Christianity that, I suggest, are based on more mainstream Protestant versions of what Christianity 'is'. In particular, I have considered Robbins's important revisiting of the idea of Christian conversion as rupture and event, that sets Christian salvific individualism against other paramount values, such as the kin-centred relationality of Urapmin people.

Mormonism certainly includes a strong focus on 'individualism', especially in the context of 'free agency' which is directly tied to questions of salvific responsibility. But it equally rests on the doctrinal elaboration of the possibility of achieving collective salvation, both in the sense that kinship collectivist is identified as the nature of divinity, and in the sense that Latter-day Saints can – indeed *must* for the sake of their own salvation- try to help others to be saved also. The performance of vicarious rituals for the dead is a way in which ordinary Latter-day Saints share in the general saving work of Christ for all mankind (see also Davies, 2010), since in the LDS view the actual performance of the ritual on earth is necessary (though not sufficient) for the attainment of the Celestial Kingdom . Although the ritual of vicarious baptism cannot force a deceased person to accept conversion (cannot override free agency), neither can free agency on its own operate unassisted; the dead must wait for someone to help them to heaven.

While the 'event' is not absent, and may be important, in contemporary Mormon conversion stories, I have suggested, even the language of separation it may entail has quite different implications for 'individuation' than those described by Robbins for the Urapmin case. Tensions attaching to the individual's self responsibility before God are not absent in Mormonism, but they unfold within a context which stresses, if anything, a movement from a more individualistic notion of religious work to a more collective one. It is precisely this potential for collective salvation of, for and by kin that appears to be a central motivation and experience for those who choose to convert to this form of Christian practice.

While it is hardly surprising – and would not surprise Robbins- that cases should differ between Melanesia and Upstate New York, the Mormon example does, I think, provide a strong argument against too ready an identification between Christianity, conversion processes and the progress of 'individualism' as a value. The ethical dilemmas faced by the Urapmin as they listen to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins are, perhaps, actually much more widely felt by Christians of different denominations and in different parts of the world. Certainly they play a part in Roman Catholic antirecessionary practices for the dead, and in a long tradition of theological debate about the Christian person's responsibilities to others. Recent fieldwork by Meadhbh McIvor suggests that these concerns may be felt in unexpected places, such as among Evangelical English Protestant Christians, who constantly ask themselves how they should

balance their own salvation against the need to try to reach and care for others with the word of God (McIvor, n.d.). A reaching for a sense of the Christian *collectivist* is entirely orthodox in most major forms of Christian practice. Although Latter-day Saint teachings on the eternisation of kinship are unusual, they develop strains of thinking about covenant and connection which are much more widely present, including in American Puritan traditions, as well as in America's more theocratic recent past. The conversion of the solitary Christian individual finds a counterpoise in the conversion for, and towards, kinship.

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